

LESBIAN VOICES \$1.

volume 1 issue 3

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Thanks to our contributors for sending material to LESBIAN VOICES! We hope we have presented your poems and articles the way you would have wanted it done! Our next deadline is August 1st.

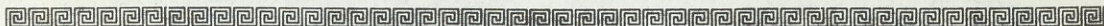
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in my dreams as a child
 her image came flooding
 through my mind
 mama made me go
 to the second baptist church
 when i was eight
 the preacher swearing before
 god and the congregation
 that he could exorcise
 her vision from me
 went on to dunk me
 head and all in a tank
 of cold water saying
 "in the name of
 the father the son
 and the holy ghost
 you are saved from her. amen."
 every day from then on
 she stayed quietly in the
 edges of my mind not
 wanting to cause me pain.

when i was thirteen
 she made herself clear to me again
 lifting me from a false god and hellfire
 she delivered me
 bestowing the secrets that only she knows
 Sappha showed the world to my eyes.

The POETRY of NORMA STAFFORD



DEAR SOMEBODY: THE PRISON POETRY OF NORMA STAFFORD, published January 1975 by the Academy of Arts and Humanities through a grant from the Unitarian-Universalist Service Committee, was well worth the few dollars I paid for it. I read the entire forty-three pages of poetry the day I bought it and was left wanting more. Ms. Stafford's writing is, above all, authentic; I always felt that she was speaking from her own experience and feeling. At the same time, she is a skilled poet, whose imagery is so real at times that I felt I could touch it. I enjoyed her women-oriented poetry the most -- partly because of my own feminist-lesbian interests and partly because I do not share her political views. But even the poems I didn't agree with were still good poetry, in my opinion.

Ms. Stafford has spent a good amount of time in jails, of one kind or another including the psychological kind. The poetry in this book was written during, her confinement at the California Institution for Women. Her work has been previously published by Ms. Magazine, the Realist, the Crime and Social Justice Journal, and the Women's Press Collective in Oakland.

In addition to her skill in writing, Ms. Stafford reads powerfully. Warm, tender, and strong are the adjectives which come to mind when listening to her powerful, controlled voice. Maybe women in the budding recording companies will think of including her in some poetry recordings.

-- Reviewed by Rosalie Nichols

my blood leaves me
each month to flow
into the earth becoming
once again the power of
the universe without which
no man can be.

my blood has flowed
through the streets, has been
sucked up and burned in buildings;
it has flowed from behind bushes
pulled from my black body by jungle thorns
in my flight from the slave trader.
from treetops i have dripped
yet my death has never occurred.

when riddled or burned my body
is found by my sisters of Sappha's
genes and they follow me.
erasing the red of my blood
they absorb my cells to
gain strength passed on to them
from the witch hunts and massacres
of me in my innocence that still curse
the men in medical, religious and political places;
those men who try to hide from my swollen tongue
on the days that i was hanged in england;
trying to hide from the charcoaled bones
of my body the times it was burned at stake;
trying to hide from my body brought up
in the cramped suffocation of water chairs
out of the depths of lakes and ponds
around Salem.

my blood has flowed each and every time
a child has been given life.

at the hand of the rapist
my blood has flowed without mercy
to be scorned and defiled
in the man-made courts of the land.

now, tired of my body being bled dry
i come back from places
that men cannot see
to claim this blood
that is me.



Sectarianism vs. Humanism

by Barbara Stephens

A lesbian counter-world? At first glance, it seems -- narrow, elitist, chauvinistic! After all, most of us are complex creatures, both in temperament and in lifestyle. For example, I am Caucasian and predominantly Celtic. My blood stirs to the sound of bagpipes and Welsh chorales; I delight in the poetry of Yeats and Dylan Thomas, the prose of Dunsany, Feona MacCleod and Arthur Machen. But faith and begorra! must I cast out those who are non-Celtic, those friends who happen to be African, Arab, Jewish, Oriental, and American Indian?

By the same token, I am a chemist in profession; artist, writer and photographer by avocation; yet my sanity depends on a number of friends who are not artists or intellectuals, or even gay, and I am not about to give up these.

On the face of it, a cult seems inviting; yet inside, there unfolds a nightmare. Small persecuted groups tend to be ingrown, incestuous, paranoid, and self-devouring. What's true of Marxist-Leninist groups is true also of fundamentalist religious sects and many of the gay circles. My disillusionment with gay organizations can be matched only by my experiences with "Socialism." You have the "leaders" out on their Big-Daddy trip, and the little zombie robots out enforcing the rules. God help the non-conformist and the agnostic who see through the game and go it alone!

So there are those who rule on hairstyle and clothes, and those who preach the butch-and-femme roles, and those who demand a sex-act quota and hound the un-couples living alone. A cocoon can be a security-blanket against a hostile world; it can be an iron-maiden which is the irony and agony of it all.

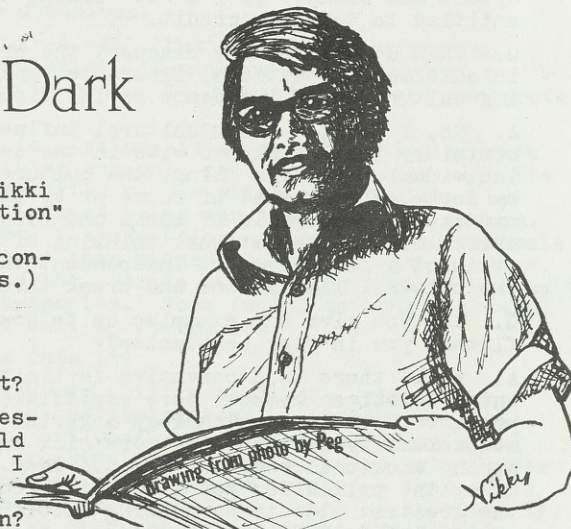
Recently, tragedy has cast a long shadow over the East Bay liberation movements. Justifiably, one can despair over the treatment Amerika has meted to the blacks, farmworkers, Indians, women, and gays. The inflation has been exceptionally brutal to the poor. Protesting is one part of a movement towards alleviating the misery of our wretched; the other is a search for a viable alternative. The issue is a critical analysis of the alternatives, and the means and methods involved. The crux of the matter may be how the collective reacts to a movement that may be immoral as well as suicidal. There is too often a mindless conformity to a line and a leader and the euphoric camaraderie of that movement. History is redundant with brutal solutions to an indifferent establishment. Such is the tragedy of the 30-year war, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Manson Family, and the Symbionese Liberation Army.

The ends are shaped by the means; the ends are corrupted, distorted, destroyed by means that involve violence and killing. A collective (of any sort -- religious, political, or sexual) numbs one to the humanity of the outsiders. Call them Kikes, or Gooks, or Injuns; or call them Pigs, or Straights -- the next step is elimination. Not aware of or realizing that terrorism corrupts, and absolute terrorism corrupts completely.

LESBIAN SEPARATISM:

An Interview with Nikki Dark

(The following is an interview of Nikki Dark, whose "My Utopia: Lesbian Nation" appeared in the March 1975 issue of LESBIAN VOICES. The interview was conducted by our editor Rosalie Nichols.)



Q. Why are you a Lesbian Separatist?

A. That is a rather complicated question to answer, and I think you would do better to begin by asking me why I am a Lesbian.

Q. Very well, why are you a Lesbian?

A. Because what I desire in a friend and lover is someone who is warm, sensitive, understanding, intelligent, compassionate, gentle, strong, tender, ambitious, active, good-natured, generous, kind, loyal, pure of spirit, beautiful, soft, smooth, pleasant to touch, responsive, enthusiastic, alive, creative, wise, just, empathetic, moral, dedicated, benevolent, and therefore womanly, female. I have never found this combination of qualities in a male, and I am very skeptical that any such male exists. Since I have found these qualities only in a woman (not necessarily in all women), this makes me, by definition, a Lesbian: a woman who loves another woman.

Q. Do you deny that any male could have those qualities, or are you merely saying that you have never met him?

A. That is a very important question, on which I have been thinking a lot for the past several years. There is a predominant view among feminists that men have been "culturally conditioned" to repress their emotions and to behave obnoxiously toward women. There is the alternative view that males are emotionally deficient by nature, which would imply that there is no point in expecting them to change and that we should think only in terms of dealing (or not dealing) with them as they are. I am tending toward the view that there is a biological basis for their difference from females, possibly in their hormone balance or in early brain differentiation. But the evidence I have read so far is inconclusive, so I have to reserve judgment. If I ever meet the exceptional man, I shall, of course, have to rethink my position. But I'm not holding my breath.

Q. Then you don't believe that all human qualities and character traits are the result of early socialization, of cultural conditioning?

A. No, I really don't believe in cultural "conditioning" in the absolute,

deterministic sense. I don't believe that an individual is only what her parents, teachers, peers, and the general culture have taught her to be or have rewarded her for being. I believe in free will, in value choices and self-responsibility. Basically, I am responsible for who I am. Whatever I have made of myself or allowed myself to become, I must accept the basic credit and blame. If I'm not willing to take the blame, I'm certainly not entitled to take the credit.

Q. Then do you totally discount the pressures, bigotries, inequities (and iniquities), injustices, ignorance, and outright oppression of the surrounding culture as an influence on individual development?

A. No, I don't. While cultural influences are not deterministic, they are certainly to be reckoned with in the decisions and value choices made by an individual. For one thing, the culture can impose limitations on behavior, by force or by threat of force or by threat of social ostracism. Also, it can impose censorship of ideas and push false information or propaganda which impedes the rational thinking of the individual. Yet there are always at least a few brave and independent thinkers who are willing to challenge the cultural limitations and break through to freedom.

Q. Can you give any examples as to how the culture may have tried to influence you in your Lesbianism?

A. Well, there is a pervasive implicit censure of Lesbianism in our culture, which sometimes becomes more explicit. I remember reading an article in a popular (Freudian) psychology magazine when I was thirteen which presented homosexuality as something very sick and disgusting. I remember having a strong emotional reaction to it. Then, when I was seventeen, I was picked up by the police for being out after curfew with an older woman. Perhaps the greatest blow to my budding Lesbianism was the rejection and disgust of my closest friend in high school. It's hard not to care what someone you love thinks of you.

Q. How did you overcome these influences?

A. I did a lot of reading and thinking about my Lesbianism, and I never could see any reason why it was morally wrong, so I don't think any of these influences ever succeeded in making me feel guilty about it.

Q. Do you feel you were influenced by the culture at all?

A. Oh, definitely. I learned, for practical reasons, to keep my closet door closed. What the culture could and did do for many years was prevent me from the open expression of my Lesbianism by threat of social ostracism, unemployment, incarceration, individual violence, and institutionalized violence. Even now, there are limits to how open I will be, depending on the context. I would try to avoid placing myself in a situation where I might be beat up and dumped in an alley. And I would avoid any situation where I might be arrested for violation of medieval sex laws. I would also seek to avoid being confined in a mental hospital, given electric shocks, or lobotomized.

Q. But you don't regard these as "conditioning" forces?

A. No, because none of these barbaric threats of brute force could change who I am or what I believe. Society can twist my arm, but it can't twist my mind, so long as I am willing to do my own thinking. I feel I can trust and depend on my loyalty to my values in the face of whatever threats society has to offer. What each of us needs to beware of is not the brute force of society but the insidious and often subliminal influences which are

directed toward extorting our own self-betrayal in the form of guilt feelings, moral cowardice, desire to appease heterosexual society, repudiation of our Lesbianism, disgust toward other Lesbians for manifestation of their Lesbianism, and so forth. The best remedy for that sort of heterosexual ploy is to expose it, make it an explicit issue so that we can deal with it directly and rationally and thus enhance our control over our value choices by making them more conscious.

Q. You state that you believe in free will, but aren't your views on biological sex differences deterministic? Aren't you really saying, "Anatomy is destiny," only turning it around to support women and denigrate men?

A. No. What we are biologically is a given; it is the raw material with which our free will operates. A thing can only act in accordance with its own nature. A human being has a specific nature which distinguishes her from a rock, a tree, or a zebra. A human being can think; a rock cannot. A tree can grow leaves on its limbs; a human being cannot. Female and male human beings have much more in common than a human being has with a zebra. But the question is whether, within the species human being, female and male are not different and distinct sub-species. Some feminists would say that the female is the species, and the male a sub-species.

Q. Then where does free will come into it?

A. Free will is a term to designate our ability to choose, within the context of our biological capacities and limitations. A human being has, by nature, the capacity to think -- but whether a particular human being chooses at any particular time to exercise that capacity is an act of free will on her part. A human being cannot choose to be a tree -- that would be outside the nature of a human being and beyond the range of possibility. Nor could a human being choose to fly by flapping her arms. Free will is limited to making choices about those things which are within the range of possibility and compatible with our nature. But when we do make a choice -- to think, to accept values, to be a Lesbian -- that choice is made by each of us as an individual and not by our parents, peer group, teachers, or society.

Q. Can't a male choose to be sensitive and emotional?

A. Not if he is lacking the biological equipment.

Q. What would such biological equipment consist of?

A. I think the answer to that will eventually be found in studies of the endocrine and nervous systems and their interaction with each other and with psychological consciousness. Unfortunately, not much is known yet, but it is a fascinating subject. Two very up-to-date paperbacks by women authors presenting opposite viewpoints are: SEX, GENDER & SOCIETY by Ann Oakley and MALES & FEMALES by Corinne Hutt. Both deal with essentially the same data or overlapping data; but Ms. Oakley, a social scientist, presents a cultural interpretation of sex differences, while Dr. Hutt, a psychologist, opts for a theory of biological differences. Both women have an apparent heterosexual bias in their books, unfortunately. Two other fascinating books with up-to-date information are TRANSSEXUALISM AND SEX REASSIGNMENT by Richard Green and John Money, editors, and MAN & WOMAN, BOY & GIRL by John Money and Anke A. Ehrhardt. The work being done by John Money and others on hermaphroditism, transsexualism, and sex reassignment is going to be very valuable in shedding light on biological sex differences and variation. I think every literate Lesbian should read as much of such

materials as she can obtain because an understanding of the biological sexes is essential to a solid theory of Lesbianism.

Q. Suppose that it should turn out that the present psychological differences between women and men are not biologically based. Then, would you not, logically, have to become heterosexual or at least bisexual?

A. No, because even if a male could become more feminine (i.e. emotional, empathetic, kind, gentle, warm, tender, etc.), there is still a great difference between heterosexual intercourse and Lesbian lovemaking. Most males still tend to think of penetration-type sex as the "real thing" even though studies indicate that women can not only be left unsatisfied by the "real thing" but can actually be left in a painful condition of chronic pelvic congestion (cf. Ruth and Edward Brecher's book AN ANALYSIS OF HUMAN SEXUAL RESPONSE). Statistics such as the Kinsey Report and personal testimony of many women indicate that many males are unaware of or do not understand or do not want to understand the "myth of the vaginal orgasm." It is also testified that even men who should know better "can't be bothered" or just "forget" to satisfy women's sexual desires. I have no doubt that penetration sex is the "real thing" to men, but they apparently are so caught up in their own desire for satisfaction and their own fantasies about intercourse that they totally overlook or willingly ignore women's separate desires. And they have had the support of the Church and Western Culture to back them up in their preferences.

Q. What about the fully knowledgeable, fully "liberated" male who does not view other forms of sexual activity as threatening to his masculinity and truly desires to satisfy his partner?

A. I would say that, as commented in the Kinsey Report, "two individuals of the same sex are likely to understand the anatomy and the physiologic responses and psychology of their own sex better than they understand that of the opposite sex." A woman can know by direct introspection what is pleasing and satisfying to a woman, both sexually and emotionally. Anything a male knows is second-hand information obtained from bull sessions, classroom instruction, reading, or "directions" from his partner. I imagine that it must be distracting to a woman to have to give "directions" in the middle of lovemaking and would almost certainly interfere with her enjoyment by disrupting the feeling of oneness and total absorption which is ideal in sexual communion. I have heard married women joke about knowing what page of the marriage manual their husbands were on. In Lesbian lovemaking, the women can sense each other's responses and desires directly, and there is nothing to interrupt the flow of feeling, the intense involvement, and the sense of union of the lovers.

Q. Still, a male could, through experience, learn to perform well as a lover, couldn't he?

A. Yes, exactly -- he could "perform." That's not the same as making love. When a male does do the pleasurable things that a woman desires, for instance, he regards it as "foreplay" and does it only because she wants it or in order to arouse her so that he can achieve penetration. At best, it's a trade-off. But in Lesbian lovemaking, the women enjoy touching, caressing, exciting and satisfying each other. There is mutuality. Each touch and caress is an end in itself, at the same time leading to further lovemaking, climax, and after-glow. Each stage in the lovemaking is important and satisfying -- not only to the woman caressed, but to the caresser. Also, the after-glow is very important -- it is a time for tenderness,

holding, and extreme caring. Women have often complained about husbands and boy-friends who simply turn over and go to sleep after intercourse, having totally lost interest in them after the climax.

Q. You're not claiming that any and every Lesbian liaison is more satisfactory than a heterosexual one, are you?

A. No. We are all individuals, and our relationships are individual. Sex is largely psychological. The degree of pleasure and satisfaction depends greatly on the amount of desire and excitement generated, which in turn depends on psychological and emotional factors. If a woman is heterosexually oriented and admires men, she will not be excited by the prospect of love with another woman. Likewise, a Lesbian is not excited by men. What I am saying is that a Lesbian relationship at its best is more pleasurable and satisfying to a gay woman than a heterosexual relationship at its best is to a straight woman.

Q. Do you advocate that straight women become Lesbians?

A. Not necessarily. I would like to see the sanctions against Lesbianism removed so that women with Lesbian desires could more easily pursue them. Too many women have gone into heterosexual relationships, long-term marriages and child-bearing not from preference, but from repression of their Lesbian desires and as a guilty concession to heterosexual society. These are women who were aware of their Lesbianism but became confused, accepted false moral ideas, or simply could not withstand the social pressure. I would like to see all women free to choose without pressure. And I think the amount of social pressure against Lesbianism is an indication of the heterosexuals' subconscious awareness of its attractiveness. In particular, it is an indication of men's fear that women will find more satisfaction with other women than with them.

Q. What do you think of Lesbian seduction of heterosexual women?

A. I think it is degrading to a Lesbian to have to "seduce" a woman who avowedly prefers men. I don't think most Lesbians are interested in trying it, but I have heard that there are some -- Lesbians who "prey" upon straight women in a time of confusion or try to "guilt trip" them into bed. A Lesbian who does this reveals a lack of self-esteem. She doesn't have enough confidence to want the straight woman to make up her own mind. Also, there are Lesbians who seem to prefer straight women; I think this shows that they basically feel straight is better.

Q. What do you think of heterosexual women who want to have an affair with a Lesbian?

A. I think they reveal a lack of self-esteem in their willingness to treat their own sexuality as an experimental laboratory, and I think they are oppressive to any sincere Lesbian they may be able to deceive into bed. I think in such cases the straight woman is using the Lesbian as a sex object in much the same way that a man might use a woman. I know also of cases in which straight women try to get Lesbians into three-way relationships with husbands, usually at the husbands' suggestion. You will find stag magazines loaded with stories of such affairs, and you will also find a great many "lesbian" novels written by men for male readers, indicating the prurient interest of males in Lesbian sexuality.

Q. What about bisexuals?

A. Bisexuals should have their affairs with other bisexuals.

Q. At this point, can you relate all this back to the original question

of why you are a Lesbian Separatist?

A. Surely. You see, if you are a committed Lesbian, then you are already a sexual separatist. If you are not a sexual separatist -- if you "relate" to men sexually, as the modern euphemism goes, then you are not a Lesbian: you are a bisexual. A lot of bisexuals and even heterosexual women are calling themselves Lesbians nowadays, for political reasons. I understand their reasons, but it does tend to cloud certain issues. A Lesbian is a woman who loves a woman. If she truly loves that woman, she isn't sleeping with men. So, at the very least, every Lesbian is a separatist in the sexual sense. The next question is whether to relate to men socially. As a feminist, I feel that any time I might be tempted to spend on men could be spent better on women or on work for the feminist movement. As far as having male friends, I don't feel they can have much to offer me, particularly in view of my feminist involvements. I do think that, as a Lesbian, I can work on limited projects with gay males, where there is a common goal. But, all in all, I don't feel that males, either gay or straight, can fill my social needs. Also, there is another thing I have thought about: Those of us who have grown up as female intellectuals and/or as little "butches" have tended to look toward males for intellectual friendships and/or for affirmation of our so-called "masculine" qualities. The relationship between Stephen and Martin in THE WELL OF LONELINESS is a good model for what I am talking about. I think this is wrong, not to mention fruitless. I think intellectual women should be friends with each other, if they can only get in contact. A stimulating friendship with an intelligent woman can be much more satisfying than intellectual intercourse with a man -- because, in the friendship with the woman, it is possible not only for ideas to be exchanged and understood, but also for emotional/spiritual understanding to occur simultaneously.

(To be continued in future issues.)

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Reveries of You

by Dorothy Feola

(to a lesbian friend, thirteen years my junior)

Looking into the lonely mirrors
Of my mind,
Toying with reflections of the
Erotic,
Spilling out into words
On paper,
Leaves much to be
Desired,
I assure you.
Not to say that I am not
Grateful
For the relief afforded me
By this vivid, overactive, limitless
Imagination
Of mine.



So
Give me your hands,
Won't you,
To press against
My (willing) lips,
And I promise to (only) wonder
How your mouth would taste
Against this other---
Incapable of even imagining the
Ecstasy
Of drinking
From the secret cup
Of your being,
Trapping
The syrupy juices that try to
Escape
From the gentle probing of this
Ever searching, velvety instrument
Of Desire---
As your body moves to the
Rhythm
Of my heart's loving/resounding
Symphony.

Two Views of Monogamy:

66Open marriage means an honest and open relationship between two people based on the equal freedom and identity of both partners. It involves a verbal, intellectual and emotional commitment to the right of each to grow as an individual within the marriage.99

-- Nena & George O'Neill

I've been considering alternative lifestyles since my recognition of myself as a lesbian -- seeking out new models of more potential relevancy than heterosexual ones. Especially recently, the open marriage model has appeared with increasing advocacy, and I found myself getting involved with it from a position of dangerous ignorance and inexperience. Open marriage, I have since discovered, is an ideal. How could "an honest and open relationship" be dangerous? The danger lies in trying to achieve goals for the relationship which are totally contrary to the necessary principles of the open marriage.

If you imagine, as I did, that opening and transforming your present "traditional" or monogamous relationship will provide you with a solution to a feeling of stagnation, of stasis, you will be right, but not in the way you expect. Open marriage will not make your relationship more permanent and it cannot make it more secure. If you seek a marriage of absolute commitment, oneness, and sharing, find some other model. Open marriage will ultimately subvert those goals and leave you standing alone and incredulous.

Open marriage is a process of relating which emphasizes the individual as a separate identity, responsible for herself. Open marriage is living in the present with realistic expectations for the future; it is not expecting permanence (cocoon of safety, protect me), total commitment, happiness, comfort, and security. It is taking advantage of one's own privacy, respecting one's partner's privacy, and requires a strongly developed personal identity; it is not being uncomfortable alone or existing primarily as one half of a couple.

Open marriage requires open and honest communication, being fully aware of one's needs and responses; it is an essential and involving process of self-knowledge, self-disclosure, and honesty. It is exploration and flexibility of behavior; it is not fixed, unchanging, separate and distinct roles. Open marriage involves open companionship, sometimes open sexuality, and is based on emotional security, independence and selfhood; it is not depending ultimately on one's partner or feeling threatened or jealous. Open marriage is founded on equality, identity and trust; it is not feeling inferior/superior, it is not being a couple first and a person second, it is not fear of change or pain.

Open marriage is a great deal more than two people exchanging permission to sleep with other people; it is an entire ongoing lifestyle. It is the antithesis of the primary couple relationship as most of us know it. In my own experience, the open marriage can serve as a healthy transition out of relationships. It is an experience of evolving which challenges human abilities to their utmost and results in exposing incompetency, insecurity, and lack of commitment to oneself.

Strive for permanency and ultimate commitment if that is your choice. But ask yourself: "How would I feel if this relationship ended?" If your answer is "helpless and devastated," you are not ready for an open relationship. Having put your energy into a total commitment to one other person, you will probably one day find yourself just as helpless and devastated as you can imagine.

Try to keep your fears from controlling your life.

-- J. Harford
(--Edited by Debbie Dick.)



“To thine own self be true -- and it must follow, as the night the day,
thou canst not then be false to any (wo)man.” -- Shakespeare

Commitment begins, not with others, but with oneself. One cannot make a commitment unless one has a self to commit. The person who thinks of a monogamous relationship primarily as a commitment to another has probably never understood what a self is.

One's self is one's thinking and valuing capacity. To know oneself means to know what one's convictions and values are: to know what one believes to be true and what one believes to be good. To be true to oneself means to be committed to one's own values: to stand by one's independently formed convictions, to fight for one's concept of good, to live by one's own chosen moral code, and to be loyal to one's own person.

Without commitment, one can never accomplish anything in life, nor can one achieve one's own happiness. Achievement requires the ability to set goals, to plan, and to make investments of time and energy. Achievement requires confidence that one's goals are proper and worthwhile, that one's plans are realistic and appropriate to the goal, and that one's investment will not be wasted. One's life (time and energy) is limited. One who values her life does not squander it on worthless goals, foolish plans, and fruitless investments. She knows herself well, chooses her goals wisely, and works toward them with total commitment. When she does this successfully, she projects a happy and rewarding future.

Without commitment, no future can be projected, and one faces a blank wall of time. One lives from day to meaningless day, with no sense of purpose to shape one's life. One cannot establish any priorities or know what is important to do. When faced with a choice, one will flip a spiritual coin and live randomly. Some probable consequences are boredom, alcoholism, insanity, or suicide.

These same principles apply to a relationship. A noncommittal relationship will flounder and fall apart. For a lasting relationship to occur, one person of integrity must meet another person of integrity who shares like convictions and values. Both persons must be worthy of a serious and lasting relationship. When they meet, their response is spontaneous, intense, and appropriate: they fall in love. Their sense of commitment to that love is also spontaneous. To love without commitment is a contradiction in terms. One does not betray one's love because that would be self-betrayal.

When one falls in love, one wants to express that love. One wants to express it by looks, by gestures, by words, and by physical touch. One wants that love to be reciprocated; and if one has chosen the right person, it is. Each sees her highest values personified in the being of the other. When this happens and when these two are united in spiritual sexual love, no third party and no power on earth can divide them.

True lovers do not need to write contracts, make vows of faithfulness, forge chains, wear blinders, or hire private detectives to spy on one another. Nor do they feel stifled or stagnant or need to "relate" to others romantically or sexually. They do not need to ask, "How would I feel if this relationship ended?" Such a question does not occur to them. They have achieved the greatest happiness that two persons can find in each other, and this happiness is their bond. It is a happiness that has no room for fear.

Perhaps, sadly, such happiness is not to be achieved by many; but it does exist. To those whose only commitment is to a belief in its impossibility, I leave "open" relationships.



--Rosalie Nichols

The Poetry of Ellen Marie Bissert

words come as dreams
in flight
they ride up as effervescence
& i need a new poetry
for you
your skin
i inhale again
again
your hair
an etude on inner sides
sinks
thru blue air
into mine

what kind of poem
do i write
now that i've told you
i love you
i refuse an image
this is it you are a woman
as i
no metaphors can i use
to disguise this
i tell you here
as you sleep tonight alone
love
i cannot but do

it's my oldest poem
i can't sleep until i've decided
to leave tonight
as i wait beside my window
ice drips
slowly i beg
the song of your skin in my hand
& must leave/have left
the smell of Circe's song
pulling me down
down & in
to your deep brown hair



Me and Sarah

-- Lari d'Arc

There's something about childhood friends that never leaves us. Whether it's the remembrance of our own young innocence or whether it's shared guilt feelings over our first treasured transgressions against the adult world, I don't know. When I was a kid, I had a great pal named Sarah, who was my friend, my companion, and my accomplice. What can I say about the days with Sarah?

There was the time when Sarah and I were about five or six years old and buried ourselves in the back yard -- really a harmless activity, as we saw it (we did leave our heads out). For some strange reason, our parents were very upset about it. They were screaming something about our taking all our clothes off and were accusing one another of not raising their children properly. . . .

Probably around nine or ten years old was an exciting period of life with Sarah. There was the time we decided to make some money: Our plan was to give a variety show in my garage. We knew we were very talented and all the people in the neighborhood would be delighted to pay to see us perform -- but just in case they didn't really appreciate our great talent, we felt that we should have an added incentive. We got very busy making posters advertising the fact that we were going to charge only twenty-five cents admission, and the added incentive was the beer that we were going to sell for only twenty-five cents a bottle. Enter once again, irate parents.

Around the same period of our young lives, we were introduced to the marvels of machinery by a neighborhood father with a dump truck. He would raise the dumpbed, allowing us to slide down and out. Then the day came when he made the MISTAKE! He let us play in the cab of the truck (careful to take the keys). What harm could possibly come from allowing two ten-year-olds to play in your truck? Well, let me tell you. . . . I don't know what harm it did him. As for Sarah and me, we lost the comfort of sitting for a while, just because we wanted to be very professional drivers. You see, it went something like this: We looked in the glove compartment for maps so we could be very professional, right? The problem was that we found this package of balloons, blew them up, forgot about driving the truck, and proceeded to entertain the neighborhood with our "balloons". . . . Enter, you know who. . . .

After the balloon incident, Sarah and I were subjected to very close scrutiny by our parents, and tho' it slowed us down a bit, it didn't stop our inventiveness -- or rather Sarah's, I should say. Being a very curious little girl, Sarah had discovered that baths were not made for getting oneself clean -- rather they were made for making one feel good. . . . She quite naturally shared her new-found knowledge with me. Well, almost needless to say, you know who got very suspicious when we two little girls started taking two and three "baths" a day. . . . and while enjoying our bath one fine afternoon, in walked my grandmother. . . .

That caused a break not only in my friendship with Sarah, but for almost three years, our families feuded like the Hatfields and the McCoys. When they decided to call a truce, I was allowed to go away with Sarah and her mother for a weekend. That weekend, Sarah and I discussed how bad we were and made a pact sealed by our combined blood never to even think our evil thoughts again.

Twenty-five years later, I fell in love with a woman, a woman who taught me to love and admire my disowned body -- and only then did I remember . . . Sarah . . . Sarah, wherever you are. . . . I hope you are happy and have found a love that has set you free.



WASTED

Hot ice-thoughts melted
to an inept dribble,
Unspoken, wasted.
She sighed her thoughts
and longed to speak her tears,
But who to listen, not hear?

-- Gay Fay

Even in my pain, my anger,
I cannot shut off
The love I feel for you
(The love which you denigrate,
Which you deny.)
Even now
With these tears
Smarting my eyes
These pains
Constricting my heart
Even now
I think of gifts
I want to give you.

-- Barbara Lipschutz

dark house---
a cold echo,
frost and wine, white hands, hair "soft as silk"
in this house all my hope is spilled
here we
were two galaxies, two grails, angels spiked with curiosity
---strange dogs.
every cough of leaf shifting
jolted our poised bloods.
the papery leaves quietly surrounded us, assembling,
with the last stars and smoke of autumn, and the cold spores rooted
on the panes
now is the need for smoke,
for a drug-stoked blood
t'aroint the mediocrity
& point the head's own Enterprise
green-programmed to clotted stars.
so comes an hour as cheap as poetry;
so comes a voyage
back past Liberty, old torchlight peerer,
to the giggling free;
to with any luck visions and degeneracy to crash
in stinking middens of song.
It's ME;
inhaling dictionaries cross-referenced to Ind & Arcturus
it's me invoking the sulky slinky & green-eyed muse used to hang around
down here

-- Mog Duff

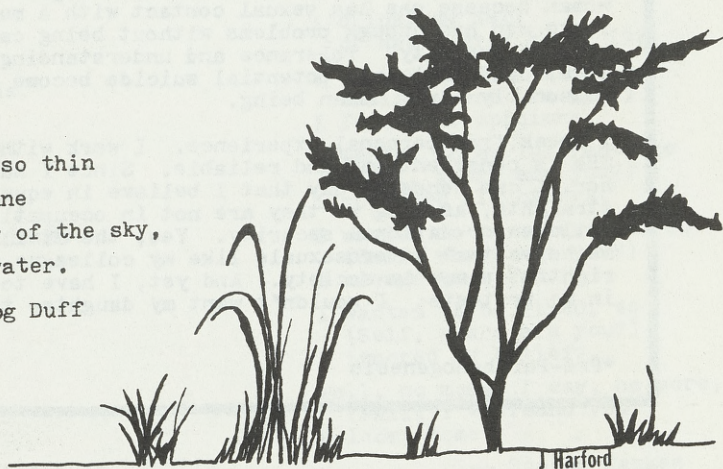
Terry, caught up in the corners of your smile, buffeted by your
 happy winds
 ---blow through me like a March day, the scrubbed skies and the
 bushes whipping on the hillsides
 stuck with kites and crocuses---
 a month in cap and bells,
 a month with a secret---
 (last year on a day like you, I almost learned to fly).
 Come sit crosslegged and giggling, hair shining and lifting, turning
 your teeth to the wind
 jingle me like a hillful of daffodils, tumble me like a cloud of
 last year's leaves---
 together we'll be invisible as children,
 spy from the ridges laugh lying on our stomachs in the stiff tan fields.

-- Mog Duff



The moon is stretched so thin
 it is a coin of membrane
 a drumskin for the ear of the sky,
 a tambourine for the water.

-- Mog Duff



In Defense of Bestiality

by Barbara Lipschutz

(As an open-minded individual, I am willing to entertain the proposition that men are human beings. I've yet to personally encounter research that is as compelling as the record of man's inhumanity to woman, and also to man. However, I concede that it is possible that primitive or experimentally raised men may have human characteristics. As a pragmatist, I admit that this question is academic. The following essay accepts the de facto status of men and attempts not to liberate them but to gain civil rights and acceptance for the people who consort with them. -- B.L.)

Many women find it necessary or even desirable to form relationships with men. Some people feel that this necessity or desire makes these women the enemy.

Granted, bestiality isn't the best of all possible worlds. But is it fair to discriminate against someone solely because of this deviation? Our foremothers fought for the right to control their own bodies, P.P.*, through contraception and abortion. Aren't we violating this sacred right by condemning a woman because she has sexual contact with a man? The woman who fucks men has enough problems without being castigated by the rest of humanity. Tolerance and understanding can help a miserable, dysfunctional, potential suicide become a competent, reasonably happy human being.

I speak from personal experience. I work with a heterosexual. She is conscientious and reliable. Since I have gotten to know her, I can honestly say that I believe in equal rights for straights, as long as they are not in occupations which involve children or national security. Yes, the civil libertarian in me hopes that heterosexuals like my colleague can take their rightful place in society. And yet, I have to admit, the mother in me protests: I wouldn't want my daughter to marry one.

*Pre-Parthenogenesis



THE MAN-HATER'S PAGE



When I was a kid, I had this barometer -- it was a little house with two witches in it. When it was going to rain, one witch swung out of the house door. If the weather was dry, the other witch swung out of the other door. But always one witch or the other was visible.

Men have something like that -- a sort of built-in sexual barometer -- and they seem to spend a lot of time consulting it. If it's up, they have to worry about some way to get it back down again. And if it's down, they worry about how come it isn't up.

I'm sure glad my barometer isn't that visible.

♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀

I'm a man-hater, and that seems to make a lot of people very uncomfortable -- especially men. When I say that I really believe in lesbianism and that I think lesbianism is much more satisfying for women than heterosexuality, straight men get up tight. A man told me that the hostility against lesbianism is caused by men's fear of competition. Apparently they are afraid we will get all the women for ourselves, and they will be left out. But I don't know what they're so worried about. After all, they'll still have each other!

♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀

People are always asking us lesbian separatists what we're going to do about reproduction if all women become lesbians. Women sometimes answer with sperm banks, parthenogenesis, cloning, etc. But there is a much simpler, logical solution. When all women are lesbians, all men will become homosexuals -- by default, if for no other reason. We will live in Lesbian Nation, and they will live in Gay Gulch. When we want to reproduce, we will negotiate a trade agreement with them. They will provide sperm and receive male children to raise. We will keep the female children.

♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀ ♀

I used to be a humanist (and therefore a bisexual). A humanist, for those unfamiliar with the term, is a woman who believes that men-are-human-beings-too. If you believe that men-are-human-beings-too, then it doesn't make any sense to exclude them from your sex life, so you should become non-discriminatory or "gender-blind" in the same way that non-racists are supposed to be "color-blind." Acting on the premise, I went around for several years treating () as human beings -- talking to them, listening to their ideas and concerns, sympathizing with their problems, giving them affection -- but then I noticed that these () didn't seem to reciprocate this kind of concern and understanding when it came to my ideas and my problems -- and eventually I couldn't help wondering if it had something to do with their being (). I decided it did. And that's why I'm not a humanist anymore.

--Nikki



Two Letters on Anarchism & Feminism from Barbara Stephens

January 10, 1972

Dear Rosalie,

Thanks for your letter. . . I've become a quasi-anarchist myself, as a result of several things:

(1) My experience with political tyranny in the Socialist Movement, which in Berkeley and San Francisco was completely overrun with Trotskyists, Stalinists; and other Marxist-Leninist types.

(2) My experience (over thirty years of it) of personal tyranny from pests and busybodies who are commonly called "neighbors."

(3) My repeated confrontations with sexism in the radical movements, in the Negro and Mexican militant movements, and even among my ideological colleagues, the Pacifists. I experienced frightful harassment when H.A. crashed at my place in 1965 and began to treat me as he would have treated his present or previous wives. So this is that "glorious institution" called marriage: to slave, honor and obey! Ha!

Yet I cannot accept your total anarchy, for damnit, not all "anarchists" are responsible. I have had some terrible neighbors whose version of anarchy is their "natural right" to meddle in my affairs, throw trash on my lawn, order me to unlock my doors and tear my fences down (all the better to rip me off), keep noisy dogs that bark, howl and scream all night and all day, and crap all over me in a dozen different ways. The hippy movement originally produced some beautiful creative and responsible anarchists; but of late the scene is becoming more and more that of ugly people: criminals, psychopaths, and completely lobotomized freaks.

Anarchy would work if all people were intelligent, wise, sensitive and considerate of their fellow human creatures. Regrettably, people aren't that way. People are greedy, intolerant, and frequently brutal and vicious. Total anarchy of the right would mean lynch-mobs after all the hippies, Negroes, liberated women and homosexuals. Anarchy of the left would mean freeing all of the (Negro and Chicano) rapists, muggers and murderers, and a witch-hunt against all quasi-straight people, such as the working class; and more crimes against women, the aged, the helpless and the sick. Under both forms of anarchy, free women and homosexuals would be the ultimate scapegoats.

I greatly fear the idea of total complete anarchy, born out of the experience of living in a brutal neighborhood. Much as I have disliked the police, I have preferred their presence to that of the psychopaths, drug-freaks, and juvenile (Negro) criminals that have terrorized Berkeley. I'll live my own life as a recluse and responsible anarchist, but will work politically toward an enlightened liberalism that will allow one all forms of harmless, non-intrusive eccentricities, and at the same time protect all of us from violence, crime, pollution, and infringement of our privacy.

March 6, 1975

Read your article with interest, so that I can make some relevant comments.

(1) As a teenager, I liked both boys and girls: my taste running to slender, delicate, "sensitive" appearing members of both sexes. I was observant enough to notice that women retained their beauty even into old age, whereas boys became men -- meaning something bulky and clumsy, gross of limb and often (ugh) too hairy. The hairiness, the prominent brow-ridges and receding forehead suggested something simian and animalistic. Too often, the physical grossness is accompanied by a grossness of mind. When women talk about men, they talk about love; they speak of affection and tenderness (or complain about the lack of it). When men speak about women, they speak about "cunt," and that seems to be the limits of their understanding. Male homosexuals share this organ-fetish with their heterosexual brothers -- really deah, they're far-out basket-freaks!

I'm brought to mind of H.P.A. -- noted author, social critic, political activist, and hater of women. He had a most astute political mind, and politically was a communitarian-anarchist. Domestically, he was an idiot. Although being married and divorced many times, he saw woman as a natural servant-class whom God ordained to serve man and who should have no other function or interest than servicing the man and bearing his children. His wife complained to me about his coldness, lack of emotion, or affection, and urged me to try to influence him into a more human direction. I tried. And he answered, "All human relations are confrontations!" I saw (in mind) the barricades, the flying bricks and tear-gas cannisters -- so much for relations of men and women.

(2) Years ago, I read a study of "Sex and Personality" by Miles and Terman, where sexual stereotypes were correlated with IQ's. The tests bore out that the highest male-stereotype interests (boxing, wrestling, football, hunting) and highest female-stereotype interests (cooking, sewing, cleaning house, making babies) were exhibited by the lowest-IQ men and women. On the other hand, androgynous types (men who loved art, music and poetry; women who loved science and nature and were inquisitive, explorative and adventurous) had the highest IQ's, ranging from 125 to genius level 200.

W. J. Turner in MOZART, THE MAN AND HIS WORKS writes: "There is one aspect of genius to which I shall only make the briefest reference and it is that I believe that intellectually all men of genius are hermaphroditic. How this comes about and what the particular nature of this synthesis of masculine and feminine elements is, I do not wish to discuss here. . . . discussion of Mozart's fondness of women . . . Nevertheless, there is a duality of intellect in Mozart which is very striking indeed, just as there is in Shakespeare, and it is this which gives his work its extraordinary comprehensiveness."

Add to this the 19th Century poets (Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Rupert Brooke) whose sensitive lyrics have correlated so beautifully with their temperaments and physical beauty.

(3) I'm not about to write off the entire male sex as sub-human; "some of my best friends are male -- ha! ha!" But I have this to say, that sexual stereotypes pushed by the straight world encourage grossness and stupidity, and penalize the exceptional creative men and women, whose genius alone preserves the civilization of our world. Bertrand Russell put it so well when he talks of "Rough brutal he-he-men and silly frilly she-she-women" (John Wayne and Hedy LaMarr) that are promoted by the conventional

society. In the job market, (male) employers want their (female) hirelings sexy and dumb -- which leads to incompetence of service which costs their firms money and loss of growth as well as smoke-screening the bosses' inadequacies. A feminist might quote the slogan of the United Negro College Fund, to repeat: "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

I have some future letters in mind -- for example, my ideological war against the Gay Liberation Front, and a dominant faction of Berkeley Women's Liberation. I was pummeled verbally and in the press by the Maoist and Stalinist factions of both movements. Later, in a published letter to the Berkeley Barb, I condemned the Black Militant movement as being sexist and anti-homosexual, reserving my hardest blows against Eldridge Cleaver (case of Cleaver vs. Timothy Leary in Algeria).

Briefly, I supported these positions:

(1) Lifestyle: a tolerant society that appreciated as well as legalized homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality, and celibacy.

(2) Personality development encouraging sensitivity, creativity, intellect, rationality, cooperation, consideration and common human decency. I condemned violence, cruelty, dominance and the entire Macho cult.

(3) Recommended working only with organizations that were democratic humanistic and non-violent, and rejecting groups that were totalitarian, militaristic and violent. I made a special case for rejecting terrorism as a tactic. For terrorism can become a habit, and a Cheka will not wither away: it merely matures into a GPU (or KGP as it now is named).

I dropped out of Women's Lib due to long work hours and discouragement over the hostility greeting my "sweet plea to reason." In 1972, or 1973, J.B. (reporter for the S.F. Examiner) wrote of her experience in the Berkeley Women's Lib, wherein she refused to accept the dogmatic position that all members of Women's Lib be compelled to live a bisexual lifestyle. Ms. B. said that her idea of liberation was freedom from coercion and pressure.

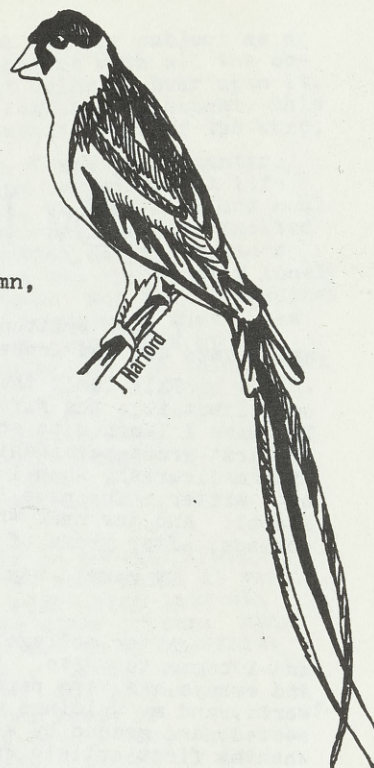
The rest became international headlines: the rise and fall of the Symbionese Liberation Army, which still has supporters in some feminist and Gay Liberation groups. I feel an urgency to publish the importance of political positions and rational thinking as an attempt to counteract suicidal totalitarian tendencies disrupting the gay/fem freedom movements.

P.S. Anarchy is wonderful, in the words of Bertrand Russell. However, not all anarchists were Russellites. Proudhon (father of French anarchy) was puritannical, anti-feminist, and anti-homosexual. Some major French and Spanish anarchal groups recommended lynching as an alternative to State-directed capital punishment. In the 1930's, Spanish anarchist communes pushed a hairshirt style of living, forbidding alcohol, tea and coffee, personal property (books, records, furniture, etc.), non-reproductive sex, non-marital sex. Neighborhood vigilantes spied and pried as a form of communitarian law enforcement. If you recall the novel and movie, "For Whom The Bell Tolls," you'd never forget the anarchal mode of people's punishment: briefly -- a kangaroo court, followed by running the gauntlet, and yo-heave-ho -- over the cliff! Well, so much for anarchy!



into the paper hands of leaves the sun dropped alms;
 into the paper hands of leaves the sun dropped gold.
 a glance fell on me in the autumn,
 while the forests were burning.

-- Mog Duff



Why

In a moment of
 happenness
 she
 enkindled an ember passion
 enrapturing my at-oneness.

In aftermoments
 my at-oneness pleas...
 why
 a glass half-full to me
 may be half-empty to another.

-- Gay Fay

And here I am
 Needing you again
 In spite of all
 My rationalizations.

And here I am
 Missing you again
 In spite of all
 My granite resolutions.

And here I am
 Loving you again
 In spite of
 In spite of
 Myself.

-- Barbara Lipschutz

Welcome Home

I'd lost my Self
 or had I ever known it?

I wanted an open mind, so
 (Self, where are you?)
 I formed no opinions.

I wanted to be tolerant, so
 (Self, where are you?)
 I accepted all others.

I wanted to be agreeable, so
 (Self, where are you?)
 I always gave in.

I wanted to be liked, so
 (Self, where are you?)
 I ignored my beliefs.

Well, no more, I say, no more,
 (Self, I've found you!)

Welcome home.

-- Saelon Renkes

"I"

By RAMONA ROARK

I have written the title and by-line of this piece in BIG letters, and I have sat and looked at my name for a long time before starting.

This isn't the first time I've ever written something with my name on it, but it's the first time in a long, long time. My name. My own name. The name I learned to scrawl painstakingly at the upper corner of the page in first-grade penmanship. The name I practiced writing different ways, with a flourish, when I was twelve years old and thought that someday I would be a writer. The name I engraved on my leather sliderule cover in high school. And the name which was engraved on my diploma when I graduated from college, after years of work and struggle.

My name. Why did I ever give it up?

After college, I went to work at various jobs to support myself -- and I began to write. I had written all through school, of course -- poems and essays and term papers -- but this was different. This was the real world, and my writings were no longer private exercises to be read, corrected, and graded by a sympathetic -- or not so sympathetic -- teacher. When my first article was actually published with my by-line on it, I felt so pleased with the neat, black letters. It was strange and exciting to think of all the unknown persons reading it in all parts of the country. And it was so gratifying when someone would write to me to say, "Yes, I've thought about that, too," or "Have you stopped to consider this," or "Your story made me laugh and laugh," or "Your poem made me cry." What was really exciting, too, was receiving my first check for a paid article, made out to "Ramona Roark, author's fee." It wasn't a lot of money, but it made me a professional. Someone had valued my writing enough to pay for it.

During all that time, I never gave much thought to the fact that I was female -- at least, not in connection with my writing. In school, I was a bright student, and I thought of myself as that -- a scholar first and foremost, a female only as an after-thought, as something to be dealt with someday in the distant future. In school, it was my intellectual ability that counted. We didn't have two grading systems, one for boys and one for girls -- although, looking back on it, I'm surprised that we didn't. The world of the intellect has no gender: thus I was (implicitly) taught and thus I believed. Perhaps it was this oversight regarding our genders that left me so ill-prepared for the real world, that left me always yearning a little to return to that cloistered academic world where the rules for achievement were clearly established and where I knew I could excel -- by the proper standards.

Be that as it may, when I first started to write for publication, I didn't think of myself as a woman writing. I was a writer writing, period. When I researched a subject, identified the issues, and arrived at my own

conclusions, I never thought: this is the way I look at this subject as a woman. I thought: this is the way I look at this subject with all the objectivity and depth of understanding that my mind can bring to bear upon it. If it was a story or poem I was writing, expressing feeling, I thought: this is how I feel as a person, as a humanist, in the broadest sense of the word.

It wasn't that I was sexless. If anything, I was too romantic. I was in love with life beyond all reason, considering anything that life had actually shown me. Through college, particularly, when my mind and soul were often so stimulated, I longed to meet someone who would get as excited as I did over a new thought, a beautiful image, classical music, or man's sense of greatness. College was a mentally satisfying but spiritually lonely experience for me because I never met that someone then. Not that I remained sexually inexperienced. I don't want you to get the impression that I was some sort of pure, chaste saint waiting for the sky to open. I went out occasionally, to different activities and places, trying out the things that college students are supposed to enjoy in their golden days of happy youth. I went to some dances, I went to collegiate beer joints and pizza parlors, I went to the bohemian places that students find so fascinating, I joined in existential discussions in espresso coffeehouses on college row, I even went to a football game -- and, for the most part, I found it very boring and spirit-sickening. I did meet a few interesting people, and I fell in love more times than I should have.

I think I wanted to fall in love very badly -- because I was always careful not to get to know the other person too well until it was too late. That way, I could have an affair, and it might even last six months before I would have to face the reality of the other person. None of this was conscious, of course; I merely tended to act on my impulsive feelings and on my over-idealized image of my partner. Truly, my love-life was turbulent, and I was always fundamentally lonely. But preparation for my career was the most important to me; it was my real core, so I never suffered too much, even at that. No matter how much in love I was, there was a part of me that I never subordinated to anyone. And I certainly never played the traditional role that a college girl is supposed to play: the going-to-college-to-catch-a-husband, got-to-get-my-MRS-degree, how-can-I-get-the-big-man-on-campus-to-notice-me, gee-isn't-that-quarterback-simply-divine type of thing. If anything, I tended to associate with the bookish boys who were considered dull and square by the others. Frankly, I found them awkward and dull, too. But I think going out with them was my way of championing the intellect against the barbarians of muscle. Whenever I fell in love, however, it was with someone who belonged to neither type.

After I graduated from college, I was too busy working and trying to get started on my career to think about social life or romance. I did a tremendous amount of reading, trying to catch up on all the frustrated avenues I wanted to explore, now that I was no longer confined to "required reading." So, when I met the man I later married, romance was the furthest thing from my mind.

It was through my writing, actually, that I first met Nathan. You may recognize the name, Nathan Keating -- he was always much better known as an author than I was. Not that either of us was really well-known, in the public sense of the word. But we did each have our own following in the movement. We met in the anarchist movement, which, in the manner of anarchists, was not really a movement at all, but a conglomeration of publications and organizations consisting of anarchists, libertarians, socialists, individualists, retreatists, and science fiction fans. I was an individualist, and so was Nathan, but we came from opposite poles politically.

I had come from the civil-libertarian left. I was from a poor

family and had worked my way through school. I was dark, an American Indian; and I was an atheist. I had the advantage of not having had any advantages. And I knew from my own experience what conformity, snobbery, and persecution are all about. Nathan had come from the Lockean-Jeffersonian right. His family was not well-to-do, and he knew what it was to be self-supporting; but he didn't really know what it was to be poor, to feel that the whole world belonged to everyone but you. He was white and firmly believed that race is irrelevant, one should be judged as an individual, and one should not think of or identify with one's racial background. Nathan's family was indifferently religious, and Nathan was an atheist -- without, however, being cognizant of the history of persecution of atheists. What Nathan and I had in common was a deep concern for our dwindling political freedom, our anxiety about the size and power of government in the United States -- that, and our admiration for each other's writings.

At the time that I met Nathan, I was barely getting started with my writing; I had written perhaps half a dozen articles which were published in scattered publications. Nathan was a little better established and was publishing a small newsletter of his own. It didn't have the circulation that some of the others had, but I thought it had much better quality, both in content and format. Nathan was very careful and particular about what he published and how it was presented; he wanted a magazine he could feel proud of. I read some of Nathan's poetry that I thought was especially sensitive and powerful, so I wrote him some comments. He responded, saying that he had been following my articles and found them very stimulating. We agreed to meet and soon were good comrades.

Those of you who were active in or sympathized with the New Left in the late 1960's and early 1970's will remember the amount of focussed tension during those years. I was not involved in the activities of the New Left, but they certainly had my attention. I was glued to the television news, the daily newspapers, and the underground press, avidly waiting to see what was going to happen. Everyone was talking of The Revolution. The Revolution was going to happen any day now. There was violence, there were protests, there were bombings and demonstrations. There was Kent State. At that time, the women's movement hadn't really gotten off the ground yet.

Nathan and I were concerned, not so much with The Revolution, as with what was going to happen after The Revolution, if The Revolution took place. As anarchists and individualists, with some knowledge of history, we feared the aftermath of a possible revolution almost as much as the oppressive forces that were trying to squelch protest. Throughout history, revolutions have been accompanied by terrorism, and deposed rulers and overthrown governments have a way of being replaced by more rulers and more government, often worse ones. That was not the vision of the future that we wanted to work for and strive toward. So, our writings were aimed not so much at how to tear down the State, as at trying to define what should replace it. We believed basically in the power of ideas. Merely trying to overthrow the government by force (even supposing that it could be done) without dealing with the ideas that made people want a government seemed like sheer folly to us. If it was done, the people's first impulse would be to establish another government, an institution which the vast majority feel is essential to civilization itself.

Since our views were in so much agreement and we were both good writers, we decided to combine our efforts in the form of a totally new magazine. We tried to keep our arrangements as equal as possible, each of us writing as individuals and also co-authoring articles and co-editing the magazine. We were each employed and made equal investments of capital in our new publication. Working together on something we both loved was an

exhilarating experience. Our personal relationship grew out of our common dedication to our cause. Soon we were living together, and then we decided to formalize our relationship by legal marriage.

That was when I first started giving up my name.

It didn't happen overnight. Unlike the traditional "bride," I didn't rush to become "Mrs. Nathan Keating." I hadn't really intended to give up my name at all. Originally, I hadn't even intended to be married. But with all the legal and tax disadvantages of being two single persons, marriage seemed like a much simpler and more advantageous arrangement. It was to be a marriage in the legal sense only, and not a melding of two into one person. Once legally married, however, I found that it became very difficult to get other people -- family friends, creditors, insurance agents, subscribers, suppliers, printers, everyone we did business with -- to recognize my separateness, my individuality. In their eyes, I became an adjunct to my "husband." I became a "wife." So, even though I never referred to myself or signed myself as "Mrs. Nathan Keating," that was how I became known to them and that was how they addressed me. Men who had occasion to write to Nathan would close with, "Say hello to the wife," or "Best regards to the Mrs." I would apply for credit cards in my own name with my own employment information, and the credit cards would arrive bearing the name, Mrs. Nathan Keating. I think the worst example was when we bought out house in joint tenancy, paying equal amounts on it, and the tax bill arrived made out to "Nathan Keating et ux" (a Latin abbreviation for "and wife"). So, by that one act of legal matrimony, I had been reduced in the eyes of the world from Ramona Roark, scholar and writer, to "et ux."

None of this phased Nathan. If I complained, he would tell me to ignore it, these people are stupid, why let them control your psyche?

What happened to my writing was worse yet. Our equalitarian arrangement in writing and editing the magazine was not recognized by our readers or by other publications, which frequently referred to Nathan as though he were sole editor. Nathan had talked me into signing our co-authored articles as "Nathan and Ramona Keating"; he was proud of our relationship, he said, and wanted our readers to know we were married -- he put it in such a way that not to go along with his desire would amount to a denial of our relationship. The problem was that when people read these articles, they must have read "Nathan and Keating" because no one ever wrote to me about any of the articles we co-authored; they always wrote to him. I had kept my own name on my individual articles, but sometimes they would even write to him about something I had said! When I did receive recognition, it was in the form of, "It's always good to get the feminine point of view," or "Your wife really writes outstandingly well, for a woman," or "Your wife is the best woman writer in the movement." I couldn't help wondering whether they would have said that Nathan was the best "man writer" in the movement. One time I was invited to another city to speak on a television program; I was invited, I was told, because the organization wanted a female speaker "to round out their panel" and they had heard that I was "beautiful." I wondered whether they would have extended such an invitation to Nathan because he was a man and handsome, and how he would have reacted if they did. Things like this began to bother me a lot. That was how I first started to become a woman writing, instead of a writer writing. In the eyes of the world, Nathan was a writer; while I was sentenced forever to be a woman writer.

Nathan began to fall behind in his writing, and I began to help him out by polishing up his rough drafts and doing final typing. We had always worked very closely, sharing our research materials, passing on good quotes, and discussing difficult issues. Sometimes it was hard to remember

who had come up with which ideas. It didn't seem to matter much, as long as we were both growing and benefitting from our cooperation. It never occurred to me at that time to feel "exploited" by Nathan. I loved to write and to work on the magazine. Writing is a way of thinking about things, and I felt I benefitted by everything I wrote. I also derived satisfaction from seeing the magazine improve and grow. As time went on, I was doing more and more of our joint writing, plus handling most of the business and clerical end of publishing. It even reached the point where I actually wrote some of Nathan's articles for him. Strangely, I noticed that if I wrote something under his name, it was received much more seriously than if it were published under my name. I began to understand firsthand why women writers have often used male pseudonyms.

At first, Nathan was grateful for the extra work I did. Then, gradually, he seemed to begin to take me for granted. Finally, he started to give me actual orders. That was when I began to resent the lack of credit for my work and to resent his failure to do his share. I also began to be more and more sensitive to the sexism of our male readers and colleagues. I had tried not to blame Nathan for other men's chauvinism -- but it bothered me that he never seemed to understand or thoroughly empathize with the oppression I felt. It was so exasperating to try to fight all the little incidents. Nathan thought I was hypersensitive or over-reacting, and he didn't want to be distracted from the large problems, the broad issues of the day -- such as high taxes, anti-trust suits, the price of gold, and whether science fiction could be considered great literature. What was the question of my identity and just recognition of my work beside such weighty matters?

In our third year of publication, we decided to put out a book, a collection of articles we had written on various issues. I wasn't going to take a chance, with something as big as our first book, of having people regard it as his book. I insisted on using my own name, thinking that readers would have to notice that there were two authors. When we received the first advance copies from the publisher, I was really pleased. I kept looking at the cover: "THE NEW INDIVIDUALISM, by Nathan Keating and Ramona Roark." It was such a feeling of completion, of accomplishment, to see our major work of several years compiled under one cover.

Then I discovered, to my shock, that I had lost my name entirely!

I first noticed it when I playfully looked for our book in the card index of the library. There it was -- indexed and cross-indexed, under subject, title, and author -- each card showing the author as Nathan Keating et al. I looked in BOOKS IN PRINT and found "Keating, Nathan, et al." So -- I had advanced, through my efforts, from "et ux" to "et al"!

It was too much! I got mad. Not "annoyed," not "irritated," not "resentful" -- but gut-level angry. Like many other women, I had never known how angry I could get. Like many other women, I had accepted and absorbed and tolerated and shrugged off and made allowances until I finally blew like a steam-boiler.

Nathan had never seen me angry before, and it made him very uncomfortable. Nathan felt guilty -- so his immediate response was to disclaim any responsibility. Nathan felt defensive -- so he tried to blank out any awareness of what I was suffering. Nathan was frightened -- so he tried to pacify me. Nathan didn't want to lose me -- so he tried, for the first time in our relationship, to exert his will and his husbandly authority over me. None of which helped matters at all.

How does a member of an oppressed class confront a member of an oppressor class with the fact of her oppression and still stay friends, much

less married? How does a member of an oppressor class admit the oppression of an oppressed class without losing face, being saddled with guilt, or becoming obsequious? If anyone ever finds the answer, please let me know.

In Nathan's case, I should have expected the reaction I got. Nathan had never understood why growing up poor was part of my identity; to him, there was unlimited opportunity and the complaints of the poor were simply envy and sour grapes. Nathan had never understood why my Indian ancestry was part of my identity; to him, that was reverse racism. So when my oppression as a woman finally became an issue between us, it was inevitable that he should regard my attitude as reverse sexism. I never forgave him. I don't think I ever will. And because he was the best (not the worst) man I had ever known and I couldn't forgive him, I have never cared for any man since.

Nathan and I split up, needless to say. We tried to do it gracefully at first, but didn't succeed. In entering a legal marriage, we had collectivized our property. No matter how equalitarian we had conceived our arrangement to be, the law made him "head of the household." As my "husband," he had the legal right to control and dispose of our community property without my consent -- and he proceeded to do so with a vengeance as the hostility mounted. I had left our house, taking with me my typewriter, most of my books, and my clothing. Nathan began selling our furniture and appliances and household goods to his friends without consulting me, and pocketing the money. He even gave away some personal belongings that were my separate property. He didn't seem to give a damn about the house; he kept living in it, letting garbage accumulate and letting the house payments go. I was put in the position of having to choose either to pay his rent or lose the whole investment. The mortgage was foreclosed, and I lost my half of the down payment and equity. I suppose, in his twisted way of thinking, he felt he was "getting even" with me for leaving him. His "male ego" ("male ego" = weak ego) was hurt; he was petulant and vindictive. He told lies aimed at damaging my reputation and, all in all, put on quite a show for neighbors and friends. I couldn't possibly go around undoing all the gossip he spread, so I had to let it go and depend on those who knew me better to discount his stories (a few did, and these are still my friends). Finally, in a sweeping gesture of careless indifference, he signed rights to our magazine and literary properties over to a male acquaintance for next to nothing. He did this, even though it hurt him financially as much as it did me.

Ironically, Nathan's actions during our divorce proved the oppression of women in our society more concretely than anything I could have said. Women do not have control over their own property; and without property rights, no other human rights can exist. The property we had acquired was, half of it, the fruit of my labor. Nathan had robbed me of the fruit of my labor, by wasting our community property. The law allowed him the power to do this. I had one option left: I could sue him and try to collect my half of the community property. But a successful suit was by no means certain, and I was very tired. The divorce had dragged on for months, and I wanted OUT. I wanted never to have to see him or speak of him or think of him again. Any effort I might have made to obtain justice would have kept me tied to him that much longer and would, in effect, have meant prolonging my oppression. I just wanted to put our marriage in the past and get on with my own life.

As I wrote the above paragraph, I could hear Nathan saying, "Oh, but you weren't really oppressed! You didn't have to marry me! Nobody forced you! It was your own choice!" That's the sort of thing Nathan would say. He calls it "logic."

As you can see, I was thoroughly sick of Nathan -- and of the

male-dominated anarchist movement -- and of our country's legal system -- by the time I was finally a free woman again.

Throughout the period of my divorce, I had become more and more aware of feminism, both as an issue and as a movement. Probably my growing consciousness of feminism had something to do with my refusal to tolerate any more marital self-sacrifice. After three years of marriage and six months of divorce, I felt literally as though I had been tied to a post and whipped -- not so much by Nathan's actions, as by a system that approved of female subjugation and by my own inability to communicate my sense of injustice effectively. I was glad to be out of an oppressive situation, but I badly needed to recoup my *joie de vivre*. The effects of injustice hang on for a long time; one doesn't automatically spring back. I needed to regain a healthy sense of myself. I needed to re-establish my identity, revitalize my creative capacities, and enjoy myself. And I needed to know that human relationships need not be oppressive. I hoped to find among womankind the confidence that I had lost in mankind.

My first foray into the women's movement was an instant failure. It was known that I was an individualist, and the women at the women's center were suspicious of me. There was a very dominating woman who was a fervent Marxian collectivist and who must have hated me on sight, since her political philosophy was the exact opposite of mine. I didn't know what was wrong, but I could sense the coldness of some of the women, and others seemed to be actually afraid to talk to me -- or worse yet, to be seen talking to me. I learned much later what had happened. Since I was an individualist, this Marxist woman had defined me not as a "Sister," but as one of the "Enemy." Far from recognizing my political anarchism, she had misrepresented my position as being Fascist -- as believing in government support of big business, exploitation of the workers, and a lot of other rhetoric. A rumor was circulated that I was a government agent. How someone who does not even believe in government could be a government agent or support government favoritism to big business was beyond me, but no one ever bothered to discuss that fine point. This woman's Marxism was more central to her than feminism; and, as a dominant member of their "leaderless" group, she was able to influence or intimidate a good many of the other women into ostracizing me before they even knew me. She went so far as to propose that the "laissez-faire element" (= me) be "purged" from the group. Such things were still being done then, in spite of proclamations of Sisterhood and protestations of Leaderlessness. As it happened, a rival non-leader and her non-supporters refused to go along with the "purge," so the Marxist non-leader lost her power and withdrew from the group. I didn't know all this at the time. I only knew how I was being treated, and it made me feel sick. So I dropped out of the feminist movement before I was barely in, and it was many months before I was willing to try again.

When I went back to the women's center again, I found that things had changed. Many women had repudiated the male-dominated New Left and were strictly committed to and concerned with feminism. There was no longer the ubiquitous social pressure to be "hip," smoke "dope," or have the "correct" politics. Along with rejection of the political style of the New Left, the women had gotten away from the "drug culture," hard rock music, spastic dancing, macho violence, and sexual "freedom," all of which had come to be seen as male values and/or male ploys. I was happy to discover this change because I had never really liked the "drug culture" and its music and its language (!) -- I remember having had to learn "hip" talk in order to understand the drift of what was being said in "raps" and I remember what a destructive influence it had on the rest of my vocabulary and therefore on my thought processes. I was glad to see it go and to see feminists developing their own style in music, language, art, politics, and social relations --

a style characterized by gentleness, gracefulness, patience, respect for self and others, awareness of moral issues, reverence for life, constructive action, long-range projects -- in short, sanity.

With the feminist movement taking this new direction, I was able to work with the women at the women's center, and the term "Sister" finally began to take on meaning for me. I was relieved to be able to discuss some of my experiences with these women and to find that they had had similar experiences in their marriages, in movement work with men, in charitable organizations, or in whatever context they had been asked to be self-sacrificing and submissive. These women had begun to define a view of life from their own experiences, rather than one superimposed by abstract political theory. We were going to get along just fine.

I was eager to get back to my typewriter, which had been sadly neglected since my farewell to Nathan and the anarchist movement. I had thought about starting a publication of my own, so when I became friends with the women at the women's center, it seemed natural to volunteer to publish a women's center newsletter. Nobody else wanted the job, and I had had some valuable experience which could be put to use in the cause of feminism. It seemed more attractive to work with other women than by myself. Not only would we be able to pool our talents and produce a better publication than I could alone, but also, it seemed to me, our shared work would create a great bond of friendship -- greater than could be achieved through "rap" groups and social life. We could achieve that feeling of movement, of progress, by working together on a constructive project. We would also be able to reach out to other women through our newsletter.

There were about six or eight women in the group that worked on the newsletter with me, not counting Joan. Joan was a lesbian; and even though lesbians were by then officially okay in the feminist movement, many of the women, who were mostly housewives and college students of very limited experience, still felt somewhat uneasy around her. They were never hostile, but Joan could sense their uneasiness and hung back from the group. Some of the women thought Joan was too "masculine" in her appearance, but I never thought so. I thought she was a woman like myself, only stronger. She just radiated a kind of inner strength, and she had the most penetrating eyes I had ever seen. Most of the time, Joan didn't join in our meetings, but just sat back, sort of aloof and smiling. But when she did speak up, cutting through the competing voices, it was usually to say something incisive and pointed that brought silence to the room -- or when tensions built up too high in a discussion, sometimes she would say something witty and sublimely ridiculous that would make the tension collapse and everybody smile at each other. None of the women ever got to be close to Joan, but in a way, they appreciated her because she was always coming from a different direction and gave them another viewpoint.

The first few months of working on the newsletter will always be a happy memory to me, in spite of what happened later. We found an old mimeograph machine, got our paper and stencils and other supplies together, and were in business. Our newsletter went out to other women's centers and women's bookstores, and it was exciting to think of all the women everywhere who were reading our poems and stories and commentaries. Other women sent their newsletters and magazines to us, and we were so glad to be in touch with what was happening in other cities and what other women were thinking and feeling. We started a weekly writing workshop to improve our skills and read our efforts aloud to each other. We had brainstorming sessions to come up with ideas for articles and graphics.

Soon we were ready to go on to a better format and went over to offset printing, which was cleaner looking and more versatile. Women with

talents in art and photography began to contribute, making our graphics more striking and original. Women in other cities who liked our newsletter sent in poetry and articles. The growth of the newsletter was exhilarating, and we were all feeling very optimistic. I, in particular, was very pleased and excited because, in addition to the joy of writing, I was witnessing the unfolding of other women's talents. To me, this was the ultimate goal of feminism -- the development and use of women's talents, the self-realization of individual women, and their sense of achievement, of knowing that they had done something well. The greatest crime of sexism, I thought, had been the stifling of women's potentials.

Other precious memories of those months concern my friendship with Joan. I had gotten to be close to The Aloof One! Joan had given me a lot of support and encouragement in starting the newsletter. A lot of times we worked on late at night, collating and stapling, when the others had gone home. Whenever I wrote something I really liked, I wanted to share it with Joan more than with anybody else. I remember watching her face as she read my typed pages, her intent expression that said she was thinking over a point I had made, her eyes crinkling with laughter at the funny parts. Sometimes I would be thinking of her as I was writing -- I would think, "Joan will like this part," or "I wonder what Joan will think of this idea." I remember a few things that I even wrote just for her, to tell her something -- although I never let on that I was doing that.

Those are my happy memories. Then something began to change.

I don't know who started it or how -- whether it was one person or several -- whether it was intentional or accidental -- whether it was the result of the particular people who were in the group or whether it is the nature of groups to work that way. I don't even remember what was the first incident leading in that direction.

I think it started with something that seemed insignificant at the time. One woman didn't like the lettering we were using; she thought it looked too cold and professional. I didn't agree, but I felt obligated to let the group decide since the newsletter belonged to all of us. The group wasn't in agreement, but a compromise was worked out. It was decided to keep formal lettering for the headings, but to do the cover, advertising, and illustrations by hand.

Next, a question was raised about the ability of "lower-class" women to read the newsletter. It was said by some members of the group that our writing was too academic, our vocabulary was over the heads of many of the women we should be trying to reach. I have to admit that this made me mad. Coming from a lower-class family, I resented the implication that we must be stupid and illiterate just because we were poor. I thought of my mother, who grew up in a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school and was not a high school graduate, but who had read all her life and knew more about art and history and politics than most of the college graduates I had ever met. How patronizing of these women to assume that they were so much more literate than those of my social class! But when I raised the objection, I was told that I was "exceptional." I was "privileged" by having been born intelligent -- and since I had a college education (which I had worked damn hard for), I had to be considered middle-class, no matter what my income level or my family background.

The newsletter was also criticized for not carrying enough articles of presumed interest to lower-class and minority women, such as how to cope with the welfare system, how to stretch food stamps during the economic recession, how to pressure the government into providing free child-care centers, and how to rip off the telephone company. No one suggested news coverage of the National Conference of American Indian Scholars, or the

Indian Historian Press, or the newly-formed American Indian Chamber of Commerce, or the American Indian National Bank. No one even suggested a story on the activities of the North American Indian Women's Association. It was assumed by these (middle-class) women that "minority interests" meant gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme. Damn, I said, I've been active in the Indian movement, and I don't think welfare is our primary concern. Welfare is a symptom of our oppression. We want to be independent, economically self-sufficient, politically self-determined. Give us justice at long last, and we won't need welfare! There was a terrific silence following my outburst, yet I don't think anyone had heard me really. They all stared past me blankly for a moment and then went on to the next item on the agenda.

Thus, bit by bit, the newsletter changed. Very seldom did we print anything about women's achievements or outstanding women of history or women's goals for the future. Someone wrote an article questioning the motives of the women who had started a local women's bookstore and objecting to the fact that they were successful and making a profit. The women's committee trying to start a local feminist credit union also came in for some excoriation -- the article said, in no uncertain terms, that it was vile and evil for women to undertake a venture that involved making money from capital investments. The local women's health center also came under attack; an article was published implying that the directors were not motivated by concern for women's health, but were greedy, self-seeking elitists who used health center funds to take luxurious vacations while exploiting women employees by keeping them at the bottom of a male-hierarchical structure.

I should have gotten out then. I could see that any woman who succeeded in accomplishing anything in the feminist movement was setting herself up as a target for attack. But I felt that the attackers were only a faction, and I had to recognize, after all, that they had a right to their opinions whether I agreed with them or not. The women's center was for all women, and the newsletter had to be open to all points of view -- all points of view, that is, except anything that the group might decide was sexist, racist, or capitalist. I remember a book review of *THE WELL OF LONELINESS* was banned from the newsletter because the heroine was so butch, and the author had written some racist comments, and, besides, the book was written in an outmoded, romantic, bourgeois style that no sophisticated reader could take seriously anymore, anyway. Also rejected was a favorable review of Jane Alpert's "Mother Right" article -- not because of anything it said, but because of what Jane Alpert was alleged to have done. Also rejected was an article on Anais Nin, who was considered reactionary, and a biography of Virginia Woolf, who was considered an example of the privileged elite of women writers and therefore not a fit model for feminists, who were busily emulating the style of the equally privileged Gertrude Stein (?).

The really major thing that happened, though, was a change in the way our group functioned. I first began to sense the change in our writing workshop. We had been reading our work aloud to each other for some time, and this had been very helpful to each of us. We often had suggestions and constructive criticisms to give each other on tone, style, imagery, order of presentation of ideas, and so forth. During some of our brainstorming sessions, we had practically written whole articles as a group -- different women contributing parts of ideas until the whole subject was worked out. When we were able to work smoothly and cooperatively this way, it was a very intimate feeling that bound us together. Articles that were written this way were signed by the whole group. We also wrote editorials as a group -- having lengthy discussion, reaching a consensus, and then one or two members writing down our final position and signing it "staff." Perhaps it was because our group functioned so well in our early months that someone came

up with the suggestion that we should work as a collective. We had never had any formal structure; it didn't seem necessary. In the beginning, I had acted as editor, but without any actual title. Three women had acted as graphic artists, two had taken most of the responsibility for subscriptions and distribution, one had done the bookkeeping. The group was small and compatible; there seemed no reason to have a formal structure, lines of authority, strict division of labor, and so forth. So calling ourselves a collective didn't seem too inaccurate a way to describe ourselves. None of us were trying to compete with each other for status or power, certainly.

I personally didn't like the term "collective" because of its connotation of collectivism, which is a form of Statism. But I told myself that these women didn't mean anything like that -- they weren't out to start a government at the women's center or set up some authoritarian system -- "collective" was just popular rhetoric that they had picked up and probably meant cooperative, equalitarian Sisterhood to them. We were all getting along, and I didn't care too much what they wanted to call it. I wasn't working as much on the newsletter by then, anyway. I was getting very close to my master's degree and was finishing work on my thesis. The articles that I wrote for the newsletter seemed very minor compared to the thesis I was developing. Most of the work of the newsletter had been taken over by other women. Joan had dropped out of the women's center entirely.

Calling the group a "collective" seemed to have a strong psychological effect, though. Before, each woman had worked on and taken responsibility for the things she did best. There was a natural division of labor based on interest and ability. Afterwards, everyone had to have a say about everything, and there was no way to tell whose judgment to follow. No one had any autonomy or independence of action. No one could make a practical decision about anything. Everything had to be discussed with the collective and a consensus had to be reached. Decisions about the simplest things had to be put off until the weekly collective meeting. The group members became petulant and critical -- the bookkeeper had to have her say about the artistic merit of the photographer's work, the distributors didn't trust the bookkeeper and suspected her of pocketing money from the bank deposits, and everyone wanted to have a say in editing all the material, adding their own little touches, blue-pencilling parts they didn't like, and giving every article a definite political slant. Those writers who didn't like having their work tampered with or revised quit sending in material, and more and more of the newsletter had to be written by the collective. The group also decided to do away with individual by-lines. Anything written by a member of the collective should bear the name of the collective and represent all women in the Sisterhood. No woman's writing should stand out above the rest because she might get off on an ego trip or become a media Superstar. Those women who didn't know how to write or had never written before should be given special attention by the more able writers and encouraged to join the collective. Finally, it was proposed that there should be income sharing within the group -- voluntary, of course -- so that those women who had children or were low-income could share in the privileges of those women who had remained childless, obtained an education, and worked up to a better-paying job. The privileged childless women were also requested to babysit, the idea being that children belong to everyone whether they chose to have them or not.

This didn't all happen at once. It was a gradual change that took place over a period of months -- well, really over the almost two years that I was there. It was a long time before I became conscious of what was happening. I was too caught up in fighting for the cause at first, and later I was busy with my own pursuits without, however, having dropped out of the group. I continued to give them articles and news write-ups, and when they

were published under the name of the collective, I shrugged off my sense of weariness and told myself that it was all for the cause and it would all be worth it when feminism triumphed. I didn't like the newsletter much anymore, anyway; it was beginning to sound so uniform, like homogenized rhetoric, with nothing original or striking, nothing individual or authentic in it. The letters to the editor were probably the best part because there, at least, an individual woman's voice occasionally came through saying something that was important to her.

My consciousness of what was happening was finally raised suddenly and drastically when I finished the first draft of my thesis. It was good. All my hours of research, digging through original sources -- collections of letters, unpublished diaries, obscure and long-departed feminist journals, legal decisions, political campaigns -- finally paid off as I completed the last page and realized that I had written a comprehensive history of feminism in the United States. I had made it a very scholarly work, painstakingly researched and meticulously presented because I didn't want any male historians to be able to nitpick loopholes and discredit my thesis. At my (female) faculty advisor's suggestion, I submitted a copy of the first draft to a major publisher, and it was accepted for publication:

What happened next, I couldn't quite believe. I was so excited and proud of myself -- and proud that I was a woman who had written this manuscript. If I had to be a woman writing, rather than a writer writing, at least I could try to make it really mean something! The women in my group had known that I was working on this thesis; I had read parts of it to them from time to time. They had seemed to like it. When I had finished the first draft, they seemed happy for me that at last I could take some time off and relax after months of pressure. When I received the letter saying that my thesis would be published as a book, I wanted to share the news with my group. I thought they would be as excited and proud as I was. But somehow their reaction was disappointing. There were congratulations, and then silence. They said they were glad, but they didn't really look glad.

The following week, two of the women came to my apartment to talk to me. "The collective has had a meeting, Ramona," they said, "and the consensus was that you should publish your book in the name of the collective and donate the proceeds to the Women's Fund. If you really believe in Sisterhood and want to help your Sisters, your thesis should be presented as the work of all women everywhere. Otherwise, you will be lending support to the mistaken idea that individual solutions are possible, and you will be the publishing industry's token woman writer. You have to put a foreword in your book saying that it was written by and for Everywoman. Unless we stand united, we can never overthrow our oppressor."

I was so stunned, all I could say was, "You had a meeting without me? I thought everyone was supposed to be present at collective meetings..."

After the women left that evening, I went to see Joan. I had often gone to talk things over with her when everything seemed tangled up, and talking to Joan made things clear and simple again. She always made me feel that she was on my side, and yet I had never defined what the "sides" were, or why it was necessary to have someone on mine.

When I told Joan about the collective's feelings about my book, she looked very grim -- almost angry, I thought -- and said, "Don't do it, Ramona."

"I don't want to," I said, "I've worked too hard on that thesis. I feel that I deserve the credit and the rewards that it will bring me. But I don't understand all my feelings about the women in my group and their asking me to do this. Those women are my friends, and yet I was shocked when they told me what they wanted. It gives me a cold, empty feeling in

the pit of my stomach whenever I think about it."

"Ramona, your writing means a great deal to you, doesn't it? It's what you really love, isn't it?"

"Yes, I've always wanted to write. I read a quote from Don Marquis once: Creative expression is the need of my soul. That's the way I feel about it, and it is a need. It isn't only something I love to do; it's what I have to do to stay alive."

"Do you think most of the women in your collective feel that way about writing?"

"I've never really thought about it -- but I guess not -- I think writing is just a means to an end to them. I don't think they really care who writes what they want to publish -- I suppose it could come out of a computer, as long as it had the right political slant. I don't think they are very interested in individual women's talent -- the newsletter to them is more of a propaganda leaflet."

"What about Nathan," Joan asked, "do you think he loved writing the way you do?"

"I used to think he did, in the beginning. But then he seemed more concerned with circulation and getting prestigious advertisers and making a good profit and being recognized by established editors. I heard that he's gone to work on the staff of Right-Wing Review as an assistant economics editor. He was always wanting to do the 'practical' thing with our magazine. I suppose his love for writing got lost in that."

"Then you've never met anyone who loved writing as you do?"

"No," I answered softly, "I guess not."

"Ramona, you've told me that when you finally left Nathan, you felt as though you were pulling yourself out of quicksand. Would you ever willingly go back to that?" Joan was speaking very slowly and carefully now, and I couldn't help thinking of someone trying to coax a child back from the edge of a cliff, or talk an attempted suicide down from a window-sill.

"No, of course not. I was miserable in my marriage. I felt non-existent toward the end. Why should I ever want to go back to that?"

"But don't you see it's the same thing?"

"Wait a minute -- no, I don't think so. I see what you're saying, but it's not quite the same. Nathan had the law, the courts, and two thousand years of Christianity on his side. As a man, he couldn't understand how I felt. But the women in my group are women like me. Why would they want to oppress me? They just want me to make this voluntary sacrifice to help the cause."

"What difference does it make, Ramona, if someone pushes you off a cliff, or asks you to jump yourself, 'voluntarily'? Either way you're lost. I was reading a book today, and it had this line from Ingersoll in it: 'Nearly all people stand in great horror of annihilation, and yet to give up your individuality is to annihilate yourself.'"

"Yes, you're right, Joan. What made me feel non-existent during my marriage was that I had given up my separate identity. And now that's what our women's collective has asked me to do again. Who would have thought that Marriage and Sisterhood could turn out to be so much alike? But why do you care so much about this, Joan? You seem so angry, so indignant. . . ."

"Yes, it's true. It does make me angry. I guess you have a right to know, and then you can do what you will. You see, Ramona, I love you. I have been watching you for a long time. I saw your energy and enthusiasm when you first came into the women's center and started writing for the newsletter. You were so happy, you looked as though you had just discovered your purpose in life and couldn't do enough to hurry up and bring it to full bloom. Then I saw the doubt and hesitation slowing you down as you became more and more hampered by the group. And I saw the bewilderment in your face when you came here tonight. I wanted to take you in my arms and wipe the hurt away and tell you: Ramona, dearest, you have a right to your own existence. Don't sacrifice yourself again. Don't sacrifice what you love, and don't let yourself be ruled by anyone, not even your 'sisters.' Fight for your cause, yes -- but be sure it's your cause you're fighting for."

When Joan said that to me, in such an impassioned tone of voice, with so much concern in her dear eyes, I knew at once what I should have known for months: I was in love with her, too.

And I told her so.

And I slept with her that night. And every night since. And will as long as she wants me. And she says she will always want me.

My book will be published in a few months, and it will have my name on the jacket: EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN, by Ramona Roark.

Woman, like man, has been enslaved by Gods and Kings. She has been persecuted and oppressed because of her social class, her race, her heretic beliefs, her flamboyant actions, her political sedition, her refusal to conform and to submit to rule. In addition, she has been oppressed on account of her sex. She has been oppressed by her own biology, and she has been oppressed by the bigotries of others who wished to define her only in terms of that biology, which in turn was defined as evil. Now, in the twentieth century, all that is changing. Woman no longer needs to be a slave to her biological functions, nor need she be a domestic slave to man. But she will never become a full person until she recognizes her own good and discovers her own individuality. She cannot do it collectively.

Why did I give up my name? For Sisterhood.

My Sisters required that I write an ever diminishing pronoun:

i i i i we

But now I know that this pronoun is my most valuable capital:

I
I
I
I
I

Author's note: This story is fiction.
But the incidents in it are not.

Rosalie Nichols

WELL WISHES

Congratulations on your new publication. We just received your birth announcement today. It sounds great. . . Good luck in everything. . .

Staff of Desperate Living

Congratulations on the new baby sister! We'd like to exchange children. . . and here's our latest. Best of luck.

Saunie Salyer, Women & Film

Glad to hear of your new publication. We're looking forward to seeing your first issue. . . You have our best wishes for success.

Women's Press, Eugene, Oregon

We were happy to receive your birth announcement and would like to be on an exchange basis. . . Wishing you luck!

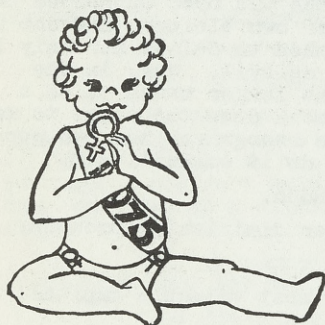
Kathy, Woman Becoming

Here is your first exchange copy of The Second Wave. We're all looking forward to seeing Lesbian Voices. Good luck with the new "baby."

Cyndi Baron, Second Wave

Thanks for your letter about the Petition. Lesbian Voices certainly has our permission to reprint the Petition for Sanity. Please send us a copy of Lesbian Voices when it appears.

Elissa Krauss, Ms. Magazine



Thank you very much for your letter. . . I would love to see Lesbian Voices. The only rule about publications is that they must come from the publisher, and there's not supposed to be any censorship. . . I do appreciate your thoughtfulness and I look forward to seeing your magazine one of these days, in any event.

Jane Alpert, Muncy, Pa.

We are very impressed with your new magazine and wish you the best in your new venture.

Del & Phyl, Lesbian/Woman

We're really excited to be getting Lesbian Voices. Hope all is well.

Women, A Journal of Liberation

How is your new publication coming along? I'm very slow in replying to your announcement of our "baby sister"! But of course we'd like to exchange. . . I look forward to receiving Lesbian Voices.

Donna Allen, Media Report to Women

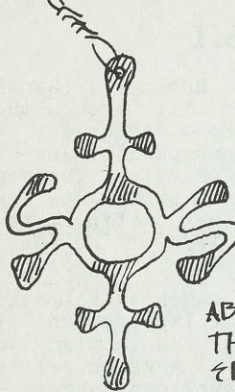
Hi. Yes, we'd like to exchange publications with you. . . Looking forward to seeing Lesbian Voices.

Chocolate, Big Mama Rag

Congratulations, sisters, you have a fine magazine here -- my first copy was well worth waiting for. I sincerely hope that I may become a small part of it with the enclosed poem. . . I have to say how much I really dig the way you don't make the word (meaning of) 'feminist' sound like something less than clean. . . What a pleasure to feel pride instead of put downs. -- Right on, sisters, and much luck to you!

Dorothy Feola, Bronx, NY

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
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BEGINNING OF THE BACKLASH

After repeated attempts, Assemblyman Willie L. Brown Jr. (San Francisco Dem.) has succeeded in getting his sexual liberation bill through the California State Legislature and signed by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. The effect of the bill AB 489 is to repeal penal code sections prohibiting oral sex and sodomy when performed by consenting adults in private. The regulations barring oral sex and sodomy in prison are stiffened by the new law, which goes into effect January 1. Until that date, oral sex continues to be punishable by up to fifteen years in State prison, regardless of the ages or genders of the participants and including acts performed in private bedrooms.

While all law-abiding Lesbians are waiting in eager anticipation of January 1st to make love as they please without fear of imprisonment, their hopes may be short-lived if a gathering backlash succeeds in plans to put the issue on the June 1976 primary election ballot. A group calling itself The Coalition of Christian Citizens, headed by Republican Senator Bill Richardson of Arcadia, predicts that they can easily get the 312,404 signatures needed for a referendum by August 11th. If their petition succeeds, the effective date of the law will be delayed pending results of the election.

All citizens who believe that sex is a private matter not subject to regulation by government are urged to make their voices heard by writing to representatives, writing to newspapers, publicizing the issue among family and friends, and registering to vote.

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